

Comment & interviews

CYCLE SHORTS

THIS MONTH THE ADVENTURE SYNDICATE, ROS HARPER'S GIANT TRANCE, CYCLE SAFETY: MAKE IT SIMPLE, BIG BIKE REVIVAL, AND THE WOMEN'S FESTIVAL OF CYCLING



Teenage girls gaining self-esteem through adventure cycling

Photo: James Robertson

Local Heroes

THE ADVENTURE SYNDICATE

This group of female endurance cyclists is working with schools to get teenage girls bikepacking. **Victoria Hazel** found out how

TEENAGE GIRLS IN THE UK don't cycle as much as teenage boys, so the Adventure Syndicate (a Cycling UK affiliated group) encouraged eight teenage girls from Inverness to try bikepacking. The overnight expedition was such a success that they've got funding from the Sporting Equality Fund to expand the project to reach teenagers from five different schools across Scotland.

'We're doing this because we love the way adventuring by bike makes us feel,' said Adventure Syndicate director Lee Craigie, 'and we passionately believe we are all capable of so much more than we think we are.'

While the physical benefits of cycling are

well known, Lee said: 'The confidence and self-esteem raising possibilities of girls travelling great distances by bike and carrying everything they need to eat, sleep, and have fun along the way, can change how they view the world and what they're capable of achieving in it.'

At the beginning of the year, 14-year-old Emilia was part of the team of teenage girls who rode the Strathpuffer in freezing and snowy conditions under the wing of Lee Craigie and Jenny Graham. Emilia has clearly caught the adventure bug. 'Bikepacking is a brilliant opportunity,' she said. 'It takes you away from the social pressures at school and

lets you forget about them. It shows you that mountain biking isn't all about the competition, it's about having fun too.'

Emilia's mum, Marisa Astill-Brown, is impressed: 'The Adventure Syndicate clearly practise what they preach. They tell everybody touched by this project that this is surely a fairer, more diverse, and healthier take on how we approach life in general. As a parent, I know I would be delighted to see my daughter's generation touched in this way.'

The schools involved are Dingwall Academy, Inverness Royal Academy, The Bridge, Mary Russell, and Ross Hall. The Adventure Syndicate will meet regularly with the schools to inspire pupils with tales of their adventures. They'll take groups of eight on overnight cycling adventures, as well as delivering camp-craft activities, bike skills sessions, and bike maintenance training.

'This will change their relationship to outdoor, adventurous exercise permanently,' Lee said, 'resulting in improved levels of self-esteem, resilience, and confidence that will last them a lifetime.'

Drew Graham, a teacher from Dingwall Academy, said that before the project, encouraging girls to try mountain biking was hard: 'I have been running a mountain bike club at Dingwall Academy for the past ten years. There has never been a shortage of boys keen and willing to get involved but there was, for a long time, an absence of girls. We tried to encourage female participation and had brief visits every now and then.'

'Role models are important and, after some female staff became qualified, we began to see more long-term involvement from the girls. Lee and the Adventure Syndicate have really added momentum, and we now have a core group of girls that ride regularly with the club and have started joining local bike clubs, racing, and exploring in their own time. Last week's school ride, we had 18 pupils: nine boys and nine girls. It seems to be working.'

For more, see theadventuresyndicate.com/our-schools-project/.

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